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- (1) McCain and his view of Japan

SANKEI (Page 7) (Full)  
February 9, 2008

Yoshihisa Komori, Washington

It now looks like Senator John McCain is the de facto nominee of the Republican Party in the U.S. presidential race.

McCain brings to mind the time when he told me enthusiastically about Vietnam. It was around the fall of 1989, shortly after my arrival in Washington for my second assignment as a correspondent.

Two years before that, McCain had just become a Senator. However, he was a captive for five and a half years during the Vietnam War. He did not cave in to North Vietnam's cruel torture, and he returned as a "war hero."

I myself spent nearly four years in Vietnam, so I proposed an interview to McCain to hear his views of Vietnam. He readily responded. To my surprise, he spared me a lot of time and talked about the "just cause" of the Vietnam War. After that, he responded to a number of interviews. After a while, I found that McCain was strongly interested in Japan and the Japan-U.S. alliance.

In my interviews, McCain talked about Japan and the Japan-U.S. alliance. Judging from his views in those days, his standpoint toward Japan in his foreign policy paper, which was issued for the presidential election, seems only natural. Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, when in office, pushed for "values-oriented diplomacy" and an "arc of freedom and prosperity." McCain agreed with these initiatives. In addition, Abe pushed a policy of strengthening the Japan-U.S. alliance. This also seems to be in the same category as McCain's standpoint.

In those days, McCain, working as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, voted against all the trade-related bills that were presented to the U.S. Congress against Japan when Japan and the United States were in the midst of intensifying trade disputes. Moreover, on the issue of the FSX (follow-on mainstay fighter support plane) selection for the Air Self-Defense Force, McCain bitterly blamed the "Japan bashing" moves of congressional hardliners toward Japan. That was obviously because he gave thought to the importance of Japan for the United States in the security area.

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In June 1990, when the Soviet Union's communist regime was about to collapse, some in Japan presumed that the United States would no longer need the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty if the military threat from the Soviet Union disappeared. I asked McCain about this in my interview. He answered as follows:

"Even if the Soviet threat diminishes or disappears, the U.S. administration-irrespective of the Republican Party or the Democratic Party-would think that the United States should absolutely maintain its basic framework of bilateral security with Japan in the two countries' common interests. Even the congressional hardliners toward Japan over trade issues do not think at all that there is no need for bilateral security arrangements with Japan."

"In addition to the Soviet threat, there are many other factors in Asia like uncertainties and changes that need our bilateral defense cooperation. These factors include changes in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, a crisis on the Korean Peninsula, and China's moves."

That is why McCain strongly asked Japan to build up its defenses and increase its burden as a step to strengthen the bilateral alliance. Around that time, McCain submitted a bill to Congress, calling for Japan to shoulder the entire burden of costs for stationing U.S. forces in Japan. When the U.S.-led Gulf War broke out against the Iraqi military's occupation of Kuwait under the Hussein regime, McCain called for Japan to specific contributions. He criticized Japan harshly for taking no action.

"We needed to stop Hussein's act of aggression. In that respect, our European allies, the Soviet Union, and Arab countries recognized the necessity of doing so, and they clarified their support for the action taken by the United States. However, Japan is the only country remaining uncommitted. The Japanese government's pro forma clarification of support is nothing but subject to the world's contempt and the United States' hostility."

"If Japan wants to remain a friend of the United States, and if Japan wants to continue its economic interdependence with the rest of the world, Japan will then have to take a stance that is appropriate for an international state. Japan can no longer hide

behind the world's most flexible constitution or remain uncommitted to any action on the pretext of an objection from a few stevedores."

In this way, McCain expressed his expectations for Japan. People call him moderate, but when it comes to these remarks, it does not seem that they are right.

In those days as well, however, some people in Japan and the United States were crying out against Japan's action for its defense buildup and its overseas dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces as a revival of militarism. I asked McCain about this point. He answered as follows:

"Such arguments in Japan about military power and a revival of militarism are groundless. Instead, I think Japan's passive pacifism is a problem."

At that time, this expression clashed with arguments among those who are distrustful and wary of Japan, like the New York Times'

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criticism of Japan in an editorial. Even now, that is still so. McCain probably wanted Japan to take even more specific action to strengthen the Japan-U.S. alliance, consolidate its national security as an "ordinary country," and contribute to international security.

Should Japan fail to answer such expectations, McCain would set forth even more cutting criticism. His words would presumably be quite a far cry from his moderate image.

(2) What is Fukuda administration's environmental diplomacy? (Part 2): Emergence from global warming; Need to think how to share costs

ASAHI (Page 17) (Slightly abridged)  
February 7, 2008

(From the fifth panel discussion of the Asahi Shimbun's Council to Discuss Asahi Shimbun's News Reports.)

Sanae Ariga, member of the Asahi Shimbun's Council to Discuss Asahi Shimbun's News Reports: The Asahi Shimbun reported on a national budget bill for fiscal 2008 created by the Ministry of Finance (MOF) in an article dated Dec. 21 in the way to liken the budget bill to an average citizen's household economy. This was a good approach to make it easy for people to understand a budget bill. But it is regrettable that the article was void of anything related to diplomacy and international relations.

In an editorial dated Dec. 23, the Asahi dealt with a drop in Japan's official development assistance (ODA) budget, writing that Japan ranked as the number one among the ODA donors in the world at one point in the past but that it will slide down to the sixth place in three years. I feel something incompatible with Japan's efforts to continue to be respected internationally by scattering money across the world, but I think it is a good thing to retain a say as a country contributing to the wellbeing of the world.

Kenichi Miyata, deputy editor in chief: In that editorial, we made an issue of the decline in Japan's ODA budget, but when climate change further advances in the future, measures for developing countries that will be hit hard by high tides and droughts will become far more costly than the past official development assistance. Japan needs to think about another fund-raising system to deal with that.

Kunio Kojima, member of the council: It is a good thing to bring up the environmental issue with the start of the year. The environmental issue is a very serious question. It is no easy matter to establish greenhouse gas emission reduction targets by the time of the (COP15) United Nations Climate Change Conference slated for late 2009. A considerable amount of diplomatic efforts will be required.

In an editorial dated Jan. 3 titled "Resolve to emerge from global

warming," the daily emphasized the need for change by means of technological capabilities. Indeed, Japan is excellent in its technological power and has accumulated efforts for energy-saving. But if every region and every industry in Japan is to shift to a society that can overcome global warming, a large cost will be required. Who will pay for it? I hope this problem will be taken up next time.

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Takumi Sato, member of the council: The series "Eco wars" is worth reading and educational. It was very good. As Council member Kumaoka pointed out earlier, we have a fixed image about Africa. Likewise, we have a preconceived idea about India. With the advancement of information technology (IT), Japan and India are supposed to have closer ties in the areas of politics and employment. I think more space should be continuously given to reports on India than Africa.

Ichikawa, editor: India is a major political power and has a large market. On the other hand, its relations with the United States are not stable. It is difficult to ascertain in which direction that country will move in terms of the economy, politics, and the environment. We plan to intensively deal with that country together with China.

Masahiko Yokoi, head of the Tokyo Head Office Editorial Bureau: I think the problem of global environment is a challenge for Japan in terms of its way of doing things being tested in the areas of international politics, the economy, and technology. In our series "The first year of the environmental era," which began with the start of the year, we plan to deal with urban, energy, and food problems. In another series "Changing earth," which has continued since last year into this year, we will focus on areas suffering from environmental problems. Writing reports in both respects as well as reports on such diplomatic events as the G8 Toyako Summit, we want to tell the readership that the environmental problems have given us an opportunity to change our society overall.

-- Some papermaking companies were found to have tampered with their blend ratios of recycled paper. What is your view about that?

Sato: When we separate paper scraps in our laboratory before throwing them away, the volume of newspapers exceed others'. In an article in the Asahi's morning edition dated Jan. 25, "Much time required before restoration of the image of recycled paper," the Asahi answered this question, "How much is the newspaper company using recycled paper for their newspapers?" Indeed, the article referred to that question but in a plain manner and simply said that the Asahi's blend of recycled paper was "70 PERCENT on average." The article failed to make clear whether the Asahi aims to achieve 100 PERCENT use of recycled paper in the future. If the daily wanted to deal with the blend ratio issue from the environmental point of view, it should have done so by revealing its stance as a large user of recycled paper.

Sanae Ariga: professor at Hokkaido University Graduate School of Agriculture; born in 1957

Kunio Kojima: vice chairman of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Doyukai); born in 1937

Takumi Sato: assistant professor at Kyoto University Graduate School; born in 1960; specializes in media history and information culture.

(3) Appointment of Ito as special advisor to the prime minister creating stir in ruling camp

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
February 15, 2008

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's appointment of former Financial

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Services Minister Tatsuya Ito as his special advisor on social security issues is now creating a controversy in Nagata-cho and Kasumigaseki. Lawmakers with vested interests in health and welfare affairs in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) are already fiercely opposing the appointment of Ito, who has asserted that social security expenses should be cut in order to avoid tax hikes. The appointment will likely affect the political dynamics between lawmakers placing priority on economic growth and others calling for fiscal reconstruction, including a consumption tax hike.

It is said that the reason for Fukuda having created the new post in charge of social security issues is to lighten the burden carried by Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Yoichi Masuzoe, who has been too busy with the China-made tainted gyoza dumplings scare to deal with the pension-records mess.

Former LDP Secretary General Hidenao Nakagawa strongly recommended Ito as special advisor to the prime minister on social security issues. Ito supported Nakagawa as assistant secretary general. He dealt with the pension-records fiasco and took part in drafting a bill to dismantle the Social Insurance Agency. In cooperation with Heizo Takenaka, who served as minister of internal affairs and communications and financial services minister, Ito formulated a financial revitalization plan urging major banks to strictly dispose of nonperforming loans. He revealed that he had received a telephone from Takenaka, saying, "Good luck!"

The National Council on Social Security, which Ito will also manage, is expected to discuss the question of whether the consumption tax should be raised with an eye on a possible increase by fiscal 2009 in the government's share of expenditures for the basic pension. Ito underscored again his view of not taking a position of tax hikes coming first. He said: "In order to realize further economic growth, I will continue my effort for spending reform."

Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura took precautions against the role of Ito at a press conference yesterday, saying twice: "He will not engage in economic and fiscal policy." However, a senior New Komeito member said: "Hidenao Nakagawa, who favors an economic growth policy, has tried to reverse direction." Many in the ruling coalition are now taking this view.

In a meeting on Feb. 13 of former health, labor and welfare ministers, including Yuya Niwa, Hidehisa Otsuji of the LDP and Chikara Sakaguchi of the New Komeito, objections were raised: One participant said: "The appointment of a special advisor is outrageous." Another: "I can't understand the prime minister's decision."

They are concerned that if a view calling for reducing expenditures strengthens, social welfare funds would be cut. Taking advantage of the divided Diet, under which enacting government-sponsored bills is difficult, there appears a move countering the government's policy of constraining social security spending by ruling coalition members representing vested interests in health and welfare affairs by involving opposition parties.

A total of 109 legislators from all the parliamentary groups formed a group to aim at a breakthrough in the crisis facing hospitals. The group was launched on Feb. 12. Upper House LDP Caucus Chairman Otsuji heads the group. The DPJ's Sengoku also joins as deputy head. One senior member said: "The group's real aim is to lift the limit

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(220 billion yen) on social security costs."

(4) Discussion between Koichi Kato and Taku Yamasaki on North Korea policy and political realignment

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Abridged slightly)  
Evening, February 14, 2008

Amid vigorous nonpartisan activities on the back of the divided Diet, a group of lawmakers from the Liberal Democratic Party, New Komeito, Democratic Party of Japan, and Social Democratic Party visited South Korea on Feb. 10-11. What is their plan to guide the

country's North Korea policy and make moves toward another round of political realignment? Former LDP Secretary General Koichi Kato and former LDP Vice President Taku Yamasaki, who headed the delegation to South Korea, discussed those factors, moderated by Mainichi senior writer Takakazu Matsuda.

-- What did the delegation achieve?

Kato: Japan-ROK relations chilled under the former Koizumi and Abe administrations. The situation has changed significantly since Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda took office, resulting in a mood for talks. We had direct talks with president-elect Lee Myung Bak, and as a result, we were able to confirm that bilateral relations are likely headed for a better direction. That was the greatest achievement.

Yamasaki: The visit to South Korea by the nonpartisan delegation prior to the start of the new administration allowed us to show that Japan's views are unified when it comes to foreign and security policies.

-- Do you think it will favorably affect the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue?

Yamasaki: It will naturally affect them. Mr. Lee, too, pointed to the need for Japan, the United States, and South Korea to work more closely in order for the six-party talks to move forward.

Kato: It might be difficult to see good developments immediately. Nuclear data allegedly provided by North Korea to Syria is a hot topic in the U.S. Congress. North Korea always takes a wait-and-see attitude after South Korea installs new president. Mr. Lee has pledged to raise the North's per capita income to 3,000 dollars within a decade if it denuclearizes fully and opens its society. I think that is beneficial for North Korea in the long run.

Yamasaki: In order to raise the North's per capita income to 3,000 dollars in a decade, the Korean Peninsula must be denuclearized within this year. The Bush administration wants to make achievements on the foreign and security fronts this year, its final year. It is also desirable for the Fukuda administration to define the normalization of relations with North Korea as a top diplomatic issue and march toward it until the fall, especially in view of a possible Lower House dissolution. We urged Mr. Lee to go on the offensive this year because the conditions are ripe. In response, he expressed hope that Japan will play a more active role in the six-party talks. Under the six-party "second-phase" agreement (on North Korea's full nuclear declaration and disablement), the member countries are required to provide North Korea with energy aid equivalent to 1 million tons of heavy fuel. Japan has not joined it. Mr. Lee raised a question about it.

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-- What should be done?

Kato: Several hundred South Koreans have been abducted to North Korea. The South Korean government is trying to negotiate with the North, make North Korea nuclear-free, and drag it out to the international community. Japan, too, should simultaneously aim at resolving the abduction issue and the denuclearization of North Korea. It is important to make a shift from the Abe approach of not discussing anything until after the abduction issue is settled altogether to the Koizumi tactic of voluntarily visiting North Korea to pursue a policy line of dialogue with that country.

-- Does Prime Minister Fukuda have that wish?

Yamasaki: Of course. Bringing the abduction issue to a complete settlement is extremely difficult, and the definition of a settlement is not clear, either. The prime minister should aim at incremental progress for the time being. If Pyongyang presents an abduction issue progress plan at a Japan-North Korea normalization working group meeting under the six-party talks, Japan would assess it and make efforts. It is important to embark on energy aid, as was suggested by Mr. Lee. Depending on the kind of progress, Japan should partially lift its economic sanctions on the North.

-- At this stage where there is no diplomatic relationship, isn't parliamentary diplomacy necessary, like Japan did in dealing with China and the Soviet Union before?

Kato: It is necessary. Many years ago, major roles were played by "IT trade" based on a semi-governmental agreement and a visit to China by then Komeito Chairman Yoshikatsu Takeiri carrying the prime minister's letter. (In 1990), then Deputy Prime Minister Shin Kanemaru of the LDP and Japanese Socialist Party Vice Chairman Makoto Tanabe jointly led a bipartisan delegation to North Korea. That helped reduce tensions between the two countries. Now that the Fukuda administration has been installed, I would like to make efforts to realize a visit to North Korea by a nonpartisan delegation in the near future, if not immediately.

-- Mr. Yamasaki, you could visit North Korea before that, possibly later this month.

Yamasaki: That is unlikely. The expectation is that the first chance would be when America delists North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism in exchange for the implementation of the second-phase agreement by Pyongyang. Another would be April 13 when Japan's economic sanctions expire. Progress on the abduction issue is necessary for Japan to lift its sanctions, even partially. Although "progress" must be agreed upon by the Japan-DPRK normalization working group under the six-party framework, the spadework must be done by lawmakers. That is why my role in the process is being mentioned.

-- If you were to visit North Korea, that means you have Prime Minister Fukuda's approval, correct?

Yamasaki: This time, I cannot visit that country independently. Without the prime minister's approval, I won't have any negotiation power.

-- By the way, there is an observation that the members in the

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delegation to South Korea have their eyes on the next round of political realignment.

Yamasaki: It was part of our efforts to build channels of communication capable of making policy coordination.

-- Although both of you pin high hopes on the Fukuda administration, its support rate is plummeting. What should be done to raise it?

Kato: Public support does not rise if plans are not put into action. The prime minister cannot implement plans because of the divided Diet. As a solution, he first opted for forming a grand coalition, followed by a stopgap bill, and tried to ram it through the Diet with numerical superiority. None of them worked. Our delegation to the ROK was called a bibimbap (Korean rice mixed with seasoned vegetables) group. Nonpartisan groups coming into the world and working closely with each other is good.

-- The delegation included Yoshito Sengoku and Yukio Edano, both former DPJ Policy Research Committee chairmen.

Kato: The delegation included a wide range of DPJ members. The two major anti-Ozawa members were there. It was an interesting group, in that respect.

-- Mr. Kato, you have been a liberal from long before. Mr. Yamasaki, you have been regarded as a person of a conservative bent. When did you become a liberal?

Yamasaki: I am clearly an advocate of constitutional revision. However, I have been of the view that Japan cannot exercise the right to collective self-defense unless the Constitution is revised. I am also opposed to paying homage at Yasukuni Shrine. My position has been consistent; the environment around me has shifted to the right.

-- What do the liberals aim at in terms of domestic affairs?

Yamasaki: They aim at correcting disparities and pursuing politics kind to the weak. This is the position of the former conservatives, though it is now hard to notice because of the "big government."

Kato: I think the foreign affairs liberals agree with the domestic affairs liberals 70 PERCENT to 80 PERCENT of the time.

-- Do you think political realignment will not occur until after the next general election?

Kato: I think it will occur after the election. Whether it is political realignment or a grand coalition, lawmakers must join hands based on principles.

Yamasaki: I agree. Political realignment is inevitable.

SCHIEFFER